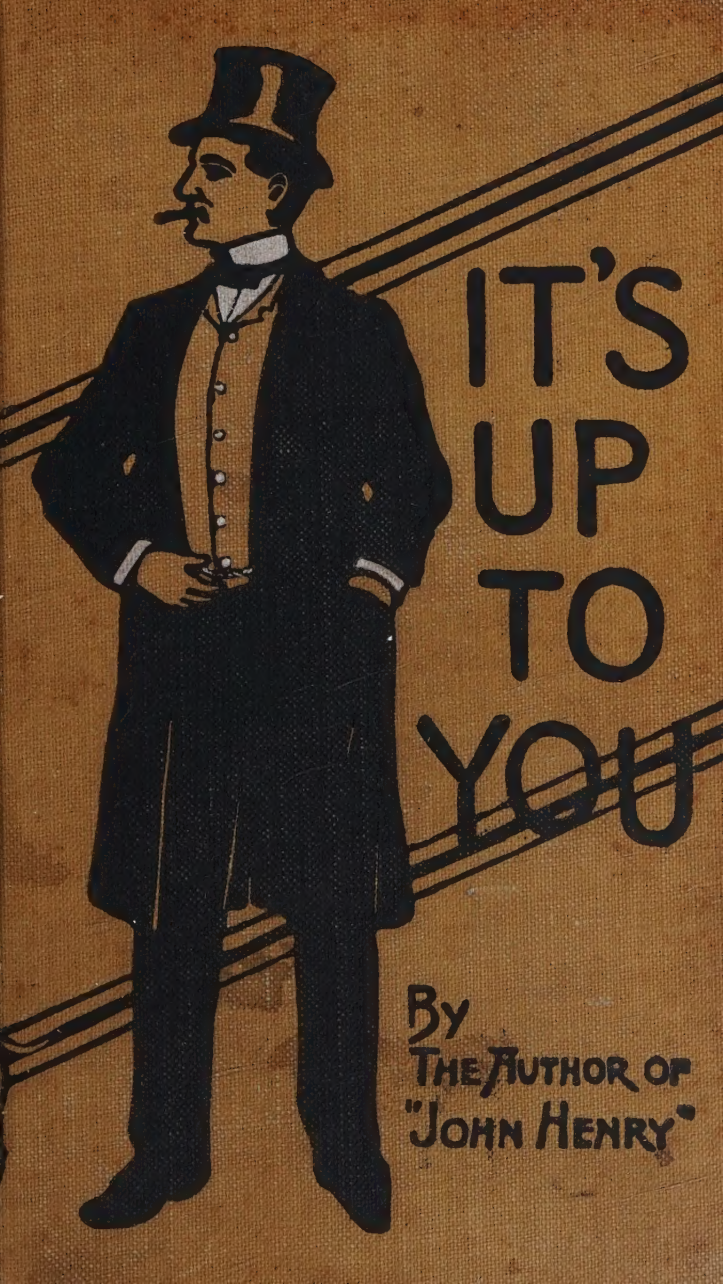
IT'S
UP
TO
YOU
By
The Author of
"John Henry"

Christmas
1902.

IT'S UP TO YOU.

"Her papa used to float in the parlor and cut ice for hours."—Page 24.

Frontispiece

IT'S UP TO YOU

A Story of Domestic Bliss

By HUGH McHUGH

AUTHOR OF
"JOHN HENRY," "DOWN THE LINE WITH JOHN HENRY," ETC.

FIFTIETH THOUSAND

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GORDON H. GRANT

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IT'S UP TO YOU

To my very best friend and most ardent admirer—myself!

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IT'S UP TO YOU

CHAPTER I.

JOHN HENRY'S COURTSHIP.

SEVEN of us were entered in the race for Clara J.'s affections, when I determined to get out my saw and do some heavy ice-cutting.

The other six were Society shines, and every time I dropped into Clara J.'s brownstone I found one of these pale boys draped over a sofa, making gurgles with his voice, and handing out Fifi glances to my own particular Pattern of Dress Goods.

It was cruel.

Something kept whispering, "John, get your brush and paint a finish for these polishes!" so finally I went after them.

Percy Acton Jones was my pet aversion.

Percy was short and fat, and when he talked he used a blonde voice.

Percy used to be a dramatic critic on one of the evening papers, and he had the reputation of being able to throw the hammer farther than any one else in the "Knocker's Union."

Percy rejoiced in the fact that he was safe from the retributive slap, because when an actor or an author whom he had toasted went after him for the purpose of handing him one, Percy would always pull a frown

down over his fat little forehead and exclaim, "Aren't you the rude thing!" in soprano—then it was all off.

Clara J. rejoices in a small brother whose company name is Thorndyke, but the family call him Tacks for short. Tacks is eight years old, sharp, and hard to sit on. I was his hero, and it only cost me four dollars, mostly in nickels.

So, with the aid of Tacks, I formulated a finish for Percy Acton Jones that was beautiful to the limit.

I had often noticed that the parlor of Clara J.'s camp was threatened with a rush of sofa pillows to the ceiling, and one of these saffron-colored sit-down-easys gave me an idea.

I took Tacks into my confidence

and explained my plan. Tacks didn't like Percy. In his estimation the Jones party was a small stout parcel of heated air, and Tacks was eager to be up and doing him.

At a candy cave I bought a pound of saffron-colored molasses taffy and had it rolled out flat and square, so that it would just about cover the top of a sofa pillow.

Tacks was with me, going and coming, and when we reached home he went through the basement and let me in the front door. I felt as nervous as an unopened Jackpot, but we finally introduced the saffron-hued taffy to the yellow sofa pillow and placed it carefully in the chair most affected by Percy.

Then I left Tacks on guard and

gumshoed away like Raffles, the busy burglar.

When Percy rang the bell that evening the door was opened with a suddenness that made him gasp, and Tacks, with a heavenly smile on his innocent face, led Little Saucer-eyes straight to the taffy-covered sofa pillow, like a lamb to the mint-sauce.

Percy sat carefully down on the sugar-coated pillow, and Tacks, hardly able to suppress his emotion, shrieked hoarsely, "I'll tell Sister you're here!" and went madly on his way.

But Tacks didn't tell "Sister." He ran out in the dining-room, put his head under a rug on the floor, and choked for five minutes.

When "Sister" entered the parlor,

Tacks was among those "also present."

The taffy had taken kindly to Percy's lavender panties.

Percy arose to greet Clara J., and with him arose that yellow sofa pillow, clinging tremulously to a background of outraged lavender trousers.

Clara J. was a brave girl. She longed to take the lid off a laugh that would startle the neighborhood, but she was polite enough to renig. So she stood there, biting her lips, while Percy bowed and bobbed, and every time he bobbed the sofa pillow went up in the air like the wash on a line on a windy day.

Tacks, in the background, had one fist stuffed in between his face and

the back of his neck, and his complexion was rapidly turning purple.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Jones?" Clara J. said sweetly; then in a swift aside, "Tacks, leave the room!"

But Tacks wouldn't go—not for priceless gems!

Percy proceeded to part his coat-tails before doing a Society droop, and in that manner he grew wise to the airship attachment in the rear.

An expression of wonderment crept over Percy's face, and with much deliberation he started to pry off the incubus.

Then something ripped. It wasn't the sofa pillow.

Clara J. was painfully embarrassed, and Tacks was busy taking care of a series of internal spasms.

Percy began to back up. Presently he hit a small table on which rested a costly bit of bric-à-brac, and over went the whole plazazus with a smash on the floor.

Percy gave Clara J. the frightened-fawn eye and started to gather up the shells from the floor.

When Percy's shoulders went down, quite naturally the pillow went up in the air, and then Clara J. collapsed.

Tacks was under the sofa biting holes in the carpet.

Attracted by the crash, Mama and Papa cut in. They stood in the door and watched Percy digging for broken bric-à-brac, with a sofa pillow clinging gayly to his southeastern ex-

tremity. He looked like an animated Japanese lantern.

It was too much for Papa. He gave Percy the hoot and ducked.

Mama teetered over to Percy and said, "Oh, it doesn't matter, Mr. Jones!" and then she took a pull at the pillow.

As she did so, Percy sat down on the floor with a bump that shook the block, and it was even money who was the most surprised, Mama or Percy.

Clara J. had left the scene of battle, and Tacks was out in the hall praying for power to laugh just five minutes longer.

Percy arose painfully. So did the sofa pillow. Mama eyed them both suspiciously.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vanvivver!" said Percy, and with both hands behind his back he took another yank at the yellow evil.

"R-r-r-r-i-p!"

Percy stopped, and Mama exclaimed, "Mercy on us!"

"It's a mere nothing, I assure you!" said Percy.

"Won't you re-seat yourself?" asked Mama politely.

"I'm afraid I'll have to when this comes off," answered Percy mournfully.

"I fear I don't quite catch your meaning," said Mother, and now her signals were out for a cold wave.

Percy blushed and said, "The fact is, Mrs. Vanvivver, I'm making a collection of sofa pillows—new fad,

don't you know. Awfully jolly sport! Miss Clara said I could have this one, so—er—er—that is, I took it. Fad of mine, don't you know."

"Indeed!" said Mama. "Well, it must be rather awkward to carry the bottle of mucilage that goes with that fad. Good night, Mr. Jones," and with this she brushed by and left him on the ice.

Percy stood there, a living picture entitled "Down and Out."

He hadn't a friend in the world except the sofa pillow, and that stuck closer than a brother.

His checks were all in, and he had just made up his mind to leap through a window, call a cab, and say, "To the Morgue; drive fast!" when Tacks jolted him back to life

by saying, "Here's Pop's old overcoat. On your way, quck! Send the pillow home by express and all will be forgiven."

With something akin to joy in his heart, Percy dug up a dollar, gave it to Tacks, and said, "Little man, you've saved my life—bless you, bless you! Tell your sister I leave town to-morrow morning very early and may be gone seven years!"

Then Percy and the sofa pillow went under the overcoat, and the whole package made a rush for the door and freedom.

He never did come back.

When I sauntered in a half hour later I overheard Clara J. saying to Tacks, "Here's a dollar, you little imp. Now, don't you dare tell John Henry."

The next day I gave Tacks another dollar for not telling me.

There was only one way to get rid of the other five saucy ones who sat around and spilled words in Clara J.'s parlor, and that was to induce her to walk down the church aisle with me until the minister stopped us.

So I framed up a line of talk that I thought would be strong enough to make her look up the market quotations on freshly picked orange blossoms.

It was a regular James K. Hackett sort of a spiel, with hand-painted violets on the side—but not too mushy, not too mushy.

I figured it out that all I had to do was to talk my lines and the girl would swoon at my feet. With a

speech like that the part would play itself—there was nothing to it!

But luck wasn't with me.

Unkind Fate gave me the double cross and my hoodledoo was working overtime.

For two weeks I was out on a side-track with my strong speech locked up in a cold-storage car.

The trouble was that the old folks looked upon me as one of the family to such an extent that every evening Clara J.'s Papa used to float in the parlor and cut ice for hours at a time, while Mama sat in the rocking-chair and made faces at herself in the mantel-mirror.

It was a fight, and there was a tie-up in the wedding bell business, but I won out.

Clara J.'s father is a Wall Street broker—retired. Every morning for twenty years he went into the Street and came home at night with a hat full.

He used to throw what he made in the cellar, and when the cellar wouldn't hold any more he got mad and quit bringing it home.

One evening I brought Papa a book entitled "An Inexpensive Way To Get Rich," written by a chap who is visiting friends in the poorhouse. Father went out in the dining-room and started to read the book to Mother, and she went to sleep.

Here was my golden opportunity and I cashed in.

I led Clara over to a dark corner and began to talk fast.

"Clara J.," I said, "for weeks and weeks I've been waiting for a chance to place your tiny mitt in mine and give it the silent squeeze—take that! Through all the waking hours of the day and through the lonely stretches of the darksome night I think of you, only you, beloved—look into my lamps and you'll see I'm not kidding you! Are you next, little one?"

Clara J. nodded.

This was the opening scene from my strong speech, and it seemed to be a hit all right; but perhaps I wasn't swallowing my palate and getting nervous! Well, maybe!

"Listen, Clara J."—I braced and began to push the lawn mower again —"since time immemorial men have knelt at the feet of beauty and—er—

er—I say, since time immemorial ken have melt at—er——"

The wheels were slipping and I had no sand.

"I say, Clara J., since time mim-mimimorial ken have belt at the meet of—that is to say, ben have felt at the keet of—er—er——"

"Back up!' said she very softly, and my life was saved.

It was the first time I ever heard her use a fancy phrase, but she had timed it just right. It brought me back to earth as no other words could. Isn't she the wise little gazaboine, though?

I discarded my strong speech and got right down to cases.

"Clara J.," I said, "months and months ago your image moved into

the only furnished room in my heart, and now I want to collect the rent—are you wise?"

"Yes," she said, and her head dropped a little lower.

"I was out," I went on, "to hand you one of those long, ready-made speeches, full of moonlight serenades and peeping stars nestling in azure skies, and soft sentences tied up in a true lover's knot, but I fell down in the first lap and had to cut it out. Now the point is this: When can I grab you by the southpaw and lead you off to a minister's, where together we can hear the birdies sing?"

For a moment she was silent, then she looked up and said ever so sweetly: "It's up to you!"

The next minute—well, it's none of your darn business!

CHAPTER II.

JOHN HENRY'S WEDDING.

THE next evening I waded into the Vanvivver mansion determined to drag Papa's and Mama's consent away from them.

So long as I played light comedy rôles I knew I was a hot favorite with the old folks at home, but when it came to doing a leading part and walking off with the daughter, I began to get uneasy for fear they'd reach for the egg basket and hand me a few unripe scrambles.

I tipped Clara J. off that I was

going to take my life in my hand and sing a solo to the heads of the house, so she discreetly withdrew to her room, and for the time being it was "Katie, bar the door" with her.

When I squeezed through the portière I found the old lady and gentleman very busy discussing their plans for a summer trip.

"Where are *you* going to spend the summer, John?" inquired Father, giving me a limp paw, which I shook hurriedly and then handed back to him.

Here was an opening—a grand chance to butt-in right at the go off.

"Well, to tell you the solemn, we haven't decided yet," I answered.

"*We!*" they both echoed.

"Why, John, I thought you were

playing a lone hand?" said the old gentleman. "I've always known you as a young man who could walk up and down Easy Street without a guardian or a time-card. This is the first time I ever heard you speak of a pull-back! Whence the *we?*"

Of course Papa didn't say it in plain words like those, but that's what he meant.

"I always thought you were free to go and come as you pleased, John," the old lady put in.

Here was my chance to climb the family tree and knock down the fruit, but for some reason or other the blood seemed to rush to my voice, and I went backwards like a crab.

Papa had fixed me with his steel-blue eyes, and I could see by

Mother's expression that she was beginning to set me back as one of those double-life leaders.

My collar began to faint and my hands grew nervous and wanted to fight each other.

"The fact is, ladies and gentlemen —er—I mean Mr. Vanvivver, and you, too, Mother—er—that is——"

Then I grabbed a cat-fish grin and sat there till I used it all up. I was over the edge. Say, this marriage business is immense after the whistle blows, but the preliminaries make me sick.

"You seem to be a little to the bad this evening, John," said Father, and Mama began to shake her head, as though she had a mental tintype

of me far out on the road to ruin, and walking fast.

I went at them again. "As a matter of fact, I merely dropped around this evening to inquire if you could—that is to say, if it is possible for you to give me—to give me your—your—er——"

Overboard again and not a life preserver in sight.

It was pitiful.

"Most extraordinary attack of hesitation I ever knew you to have," said Father, while Mama simply sat there and focussed me with her sad, reproachful lanterns.

"Perhaps you need something to brace you up," suggested the old gentleman.

I needed a Sanitarium and a corps

of efficient physicians, but I didn't say so.

At that moment I was doing a chump act never before equalled in the history of the world. My eyes looked like a couple of vacant lots and I had reversed grins, and was now using the style most affected by a stuffed leopard.

"The boy may be suffering from incipient brain fever, or is he in love?" whispered the old lady.

"Huh!" exclaimed Papa; "in love, eh? That's it. When's the wedding? Who's the girl? Sorry to lose you, John, but the best of friends must part in the divorce court. Ha, ha!"

That cackle went right through me and splashed on the wall behind me. The old man was a fierce joke pusher.

"Come on now, John," he continued, "who is she? Have you told Clara? She'll be lonely, for you are certainly the best time killer she ever had. Speak out, we are your friends, even if you are going to pass us up."

"It was good of you, John, to come to us with the news first. Wasn't it, Absalom?" smiled the old lady.

Father nodded his head vigorously, and there I sat with my mouth wide open—a regular Charlie Foolishface. I wanted to speak, but every word in my body was back-pedalling.

It was scandalous.

If I had realized what it meant to go up against an unsuspecting family council I certainly would have coaxed Clara J. to elope. Then I could have

sent her beloved parents a postal card, breaking the awful news thus: "May I have your daughter? Thanks. I have her now. Last tag, you're It."

I began to recover consciousness slowly, and muttered, "You have me sized wrong. What I want to ask you is, may I——"

Just then Tacks rushed in with a whoop. "Pop! Mom! What d'ye think? John Henry and Clara Jane are going to get married!"

"Greenwood Cemetery—no flowers!" I murmured, and waited for the axe.

After a painful pause I opened my eyes and said, "What's the answer?"

Papa and Mama had risen and were giving me the look-over with a

side-smile I couldn't quite understand.

"What's the answer?" I repeated, prepared to duck and avoid a rush of furniture to the head.

Papa placed Mama's arm gently under his own and started away.

At the door the old gentleman turned and said, "John, it's up to you!"

Then they both chuckled and left me flat.

If ever that boy Tack needs a friend I'm for the job, sure thing!

Presently Clara J. came down from her nest in the gallery, and when she saw that I had survived the fight we decided to hold a reunion.

Two or three evenings later I picked my way into the house be-

tween double rows of messenger boys and dry goods deliverers; fell over about eight tons of packages, and, after divers perils by land and sea, finally drifted into the parlor. There sat Marietta Dawson, telling Clara J. all she had ever heard.

Marietta was to be the maid of honor, but to hear her talk you'd think she was the leading lady. That girl had the busiest voice I ever heard.

She certainly was a hard worker with the gab.

"Evening, ladies!" I said.

Clara J. gave me a spectral sort of a smile and Marietta shook her back hair at me, then they clinched.

"But I'm afraid, Marietta"—Clara J. was at the bat—"that I may not

look well in ivory white. I do wish, Marietta, that I had chosen the other shade; and the train, Marietta; don't you think two yards too long for me? Now *do* tell me! I'm sure it will be. Oh, Marietta, do you think that old lace will be as becoming as the fresh tulle would have been?"

"Nice evening!" I suggested, but they had forgotten I was in the room.

"Why, Clara Jane!" gurgled the girl with the spendthrift tongue, "you know that your old point will turn all the women green with envy. I'm sure nothing on earth could persuade me to think of a tulle veil when I had such perfectly exquisite lace. Now there was Helen Duval—you remember when Helen was married? She had one of those——"

Then Marietta pulled the throttle wide open and took us to Helen's wedding and back again and all over the place. It was one of the longest and noisiest journeys I ever made.

"Got any wood for me to saw?" I interrupted after a bit. I was tired of playing solitaire.

"Pardon us," said Marietta, giving me enough eye-ice to keep me cutting for a month; "we are *so* busy!" Then to Clara J., "what did you say, dear?"

Clara J. grabbed her cue. "Really, now, Marietta, *do* you think that the sleeves are clever? I think a frock with poor sleeves is an abomination."

"Just think of being married in sleeves that were not absolutely smart!" cried Marietta.

Her voice seemed to have a high fever.

"And the lines of the skirt," Clara J. went on; "do you think they are good? You know a wedding dress should have *good* lines, Marietta; good, sweeping lines. Of course I know the design was good; but made up, Marietta, do you think it will be good made up?"

"When do you expect to get those glad garments cooked up?" I ventured; but all the wires were down in my direction, and I got no answer.

Clara J. took out her hammer and began to tap the bridesmaids, while Marietta held the anvil, so I got up sideways and went home.

It was the most cruel game of freeze-out I ever sat in.

All in good season the presents began to show up. One evening the minister, who was a friend of the family, dropped in to see if they would suit. Nearly everybody I knew had sent us a cut-glass decanter, and when the minister saw the bunch of booze wrappers he made me rush out and sign the pledge.

With the exception of two or three of those present, the wedding was the happiest affair of the kind I ever attended. I was one of the exceptions.

When the fateful hour drew nigh my heart crawled up in my throat and refused to go back home. I suppose it wanted to see the show.

As I stood near the chancel waiting for the bride to come and get me, I felt like a bottle of ketchup with the

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the booze wrappers!"—Page 42.

cork out. It seemed to me that everybody in the world was giving me the fish eye.

I couldn't remember whether I should wear my hands in my pockets or in my mouth, so I tried both styles.

Presently I caught the eye of Sydney DeBrie, and he didn't do a thing but throw off a grin that nearly put me out of the wedding business.

Sydney was one of the ushers, but he should have been away back sitting down at his work in the soap factory. He was one of the Five Little Shines who used to drop in on Clara J. of an evening and tease her with their talk. I don't know why I ever consented to let that human potato-salad be an usher. He couldn't ush for sour pickles. All he could

do was to put his face where I could see it and let tired Nature do the rest.

About this time Billy DeVries, my best man, began to wilt. I didn't dare look at him, but I knew that mentally he was yelling for ice water. Outwardly he was very nervous, and he put in his spare time trying to chew his necktie.

Still, the thought flashed over me that Billy, being a college graduate and a football survivor, showed wonderful self-control in confining himself to a conflict between his teeth and his necktie. It's a wonder he didn't give the minister the low tackle and try for a touchdown.

Then the procession came down the aisle and the bell rang for the wind-up.

Clara J. was a dream. I played an alarm clock.

One of the bridesmaids got gabby and wanted to talk her way into the main tent, but all around her were kind-hearted people, so she wasn't pinched.

Pretty soon the minister sprung that old gag on me about the ring, and I suppose for a moment he thought he had me, but I fooled him.

I know it's customary for the bridegroom to get so rattled that he loses the ring, so I wasn't taking any chances. The day before the wedding I bought eight rings, and when the battle was raging I had them stored away in every pocket and a spare one in each shoe.

No fumble on the ring—not for me!

No matter in which direction I dipped I was sure to fish up a ring. I think I'll get this idea patented.

Then the minister made a few cracks at us, but we called him every time, politely but firmly, and presently he handed us a card and said we were duly elected members of the Married People's Union.

Immediately thereafter we all went home in a flock of hacks to take a fall out of one of the finest wedding breakfasts that ever came off the griddle.

For one little moment Clara J. and I were alone in the library.

"Did I do all right?" she asked eagerly.

"You! The limit!" I said. "You looked like a queen. But, wait! Stop the wagon! Why, bless me, in the excitement of a quick finish nobody had time to kiss the bride!"

She put her face very, very close to mine and said with the sweetest of smiles, "Once more, John, it seems to be up to you!"

CHAPTER III.

JOHN HENRY'S HONEYMOON TRIP.

JUST as I closed the door of the cab which was to take us to the station, Elder Humbird deemed it advisable to hike an old shoe at us.

The shoe wasn't eager to work, so it struck the first soft spot it found and stayed there. The soft spot happened to be just beneath the ear of the cab driver. His name was Cassidy, but that didn't prevent him from swearing in eight different languages.

When Cassidy finally pulled the shoe out of his head he jumped off

the cab and started to thank Elder personally.

At the same moment Billy DeVries hopped up on the driver's seat, headed the horses in the direction of the depot, and gave them the whip.

Honestly, we thought we were riding on the last section of a stingy-tailed comet.

We didn't stop to go 'round the corners on one wheel. That had often been done before, and these horses were not conventional.

They simply jumped over the corners. I believe they must have been grasshoppers of a larger growth.

Clara J. turned pale and held on to me with both hands, but all I could hold was my breath.

At the end of the second block we

were trailed by seven policemen and an ambulance, but we travelled so fast they finally decided to forget it and went back to sleep.

When we reached the station, Clara J., pale but game, smiled at Billy and said sweetly, "I'm awfully glad we didn't miss the train. Horses can be so provokingly slow, can't they?"

Then I chipped in with, "Missed the cow-path, didn't you, Bill? Or did you forget something and go back after it?"

Billy looked at us, twin pictures of calm content, then at the foam-flecked horses, and then he went over in the freight shed and put the boots to himself.

Of course the bunch came down to

the depot to see us on our way, and, as is customary on such occasions, every member of the push felt inspired to give a correct imitation of a howling idiot.

There were at least fifty Indians in the gang, and they rushed around the place, yelling and screaming and making faces at people they had never seen before.

If there was anybody in the wide, wide world who hadn't been put wise to the fact that Clara J. and I were recently married it wasn't the fault of our bughouse friends.

There was one dub there named Benedict Murgatoyd, but of course he wasn't to blame for that. Benedict had a face like a cow, and that wasn't his fault either.

No doubt you know lots of people who always smile and look conscious when accused of having bovine eyes, but did you ever catch the fellow with a whole face like a cow?

Benedict Murgatoyd is the answer. Every time he looked at me I thought of the Beef Trust and shuddered.

And there was B. M., with his sirloin-steak expression, running up and down the platform yelling, "Speech! Speech!"

I should have called a policeman and told him to lead B. M. away to the cattle pound, but I was charitable.

In the meantime the deafening noise continued and grew apace. Tacks was there with a tin horn and a bean shooter. He gave me one of

the beans to keep for him. It's in my neck somewhere yet.

When presently the boys with the artesian-well voices bunched their heads and started to sing, I realized it was time for Clara J. and myself to shake the society of our enthusiastic friends.

Without any exception they were the worst warblers that ever went after a chord. Every time a high note showed up they took it and wrung its neck without the least compunction.

The melody never lived that they couldn't set back, and they were buzzards when it came to the close harmony.

Before the boys had sung four bars all the passengers in the train had

their heads out of the windows praying for rain.

I went into the car and spoke rapidly to the porter, punctuating my final sentence with a dollar note. He led us to a rear platform, opened a gate, and we flew across the tracks.

On the other side we caught an East-bound local, rode to the next station, and waited there two hours for a Western through train.

"In this manner, little woman," I said to Clara J., "we give the mob the merry go-by. No doubt they will hang around the platform yelling their lungs out into unresponsive ears, and I hope it chokes them!"

"The idea is Napoleonic," said Clara J., and I let it go at that.

We decided before we stepped on

"The rice showered all
over the place!"—Page 55.

the Pullman that it would be nix on the sweetheart talk, and we agreed to cut out all the ootsey-oo glances.

When our train rolled in the bride looked as solemn as Miss Stone did the day she shook a day-day to the brigands, and I had that long-married air peculiar to a professional husband from Salt Lake.

We thought we had the travelling public with its back to us till I tried to put my hat up on the rack and the rice showered all over the place —then it was all off!

A stout drummer in the seat across the aisle gave us the fat man's ripple.

Did you ever notice one of those real fat boys with the vestibuled chin when he starts to laugh?

It's like throwing a stone in the

mill pond. He makes a splash with his mouth and then the ripples roll outward over the chin and onward until they're lost somewhere in the vicinity of Mason and Dixon's line.

However, we quickly made up our minds that the fat drummer wasn't heavy enough to spoil our trip even if he was wise to the rice, so we promptly cut him out.

As soon as Old Stoutness saw his ripple wasn't making good he put up the shutters and went to building dreams.

Clara J. insisted that I should go out in the smoker and annoy one of those rough and ready smoke-ups the train boy keeps in a cigar box cage, so after a little persuasion my guess was the same as hers, and I went.

Two minutes later I had both feet in a tub of sorrow.

The moment I entered the smoke house I was greeted with yells of enthusiastic delight from the lips of Ned Burnham, Walter Parks, and Jim Darcey, all pals of mine when we were at Yale together.

Then the three of them got up and handed me this :

"Brek-e-ke-kex, co-ax, co-ax!
Brek-e-ke-kex, co-ax, co-ax!
Woo-op! Woo-op! Hullabaloo!
Yale! Yale! Yale!
Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra!
John Henry!"

I could see my finish sitting on the doorstep, chewing a straw and waiting for me.

These three ducks are the worst kidders that ever caromed over a

campus, and for me to tell them that I was carrying excess baggage and a blushing bride in the other end of the wagon would be the signal for an outburst of jocularity which might result fatally.

Ned Burnham was the worst of the bunch. Ned wore his teeth parted in the middle, and when he smiled his mouth looked like a garden fence with the gate missing.

At college Ned and I were members of Alpha Shoota Piker. As a matter of fact we wrote all those Greek letter things. With the other two, we also belonged to Youcan Searchme Ipsilon, and we all pulled an oar in the college Glee Club. Jim Darcey could beat a banjo longer and get more groans out of it than any

man in the Knowledge Works. Walter's specialty was football. He won two medals and a broken knee-cap at it.

Well, say! Perhaps this loud little bunch of bad men didn't go out to make the hours pleasant for me!

We hadn't seen each other for nearly a year, and immediately they elected me chairman of the entertainment committee.

In his grip at his feet Ned Burnham had a long bottle of boozelene, and he insisted that I should soak it all up, because he wanted to throw the bottle out of the window at a farmer he didn't like just down the line.

Then Jim Darcey began to say things.

In ordinary conversation Jim has a voice that sounds like a loud cry for help, but when he gets excited he talks like a series of rock blasts along the Palisades.

"Say, John," he exploded, "how about that sad-eyed dame you used to be engaged to in New Haven? When does she begin to open your mail?"

"Shut up, you woodpecker!" I yelled. "That's all off long ago."

If ever the train slowed up Clara J. would surely hear him, and it was no safe bet that she wasn't receiving his voice right now.

"Remember the night you took her to one of George Lederer's shows and she sat there all the evening without batting an eye?" he yelled.

I made a gesture of disdain, but he wouldn't let go.

"On the way home you asked the lady what made her so quiet, and she said, 'Didn't you tell me once that Mr. Lederer always makes his chorus girls show their teeth?' 'Sure thing! What's the puzzle?' you replied. 'Well,' she said, in her innocent New Haven way, 'their dressmaker has played a cruel joke on Mr. Lederer, for their dresses were merely incidental, and not dental!'"

There was a roar which rose high above the rumble of the train, and I knew the joshers had started to pass the contribution box.

"How about that brown-haired queen from Brockton, Mass.?" Ned inquired. "We expected to hear the

village bells ring out long ago. Did your love grow cold, or did she ring for a waiter and order your soup, John?"

"Why, I saved up my hunger for a whole month hoping to be asked over to a boiled New England dinner with John," Walter chirped.

Then I drew my own harpoon and jabbed it around promiscuously, but unfortunately for me it didn't seem to affect the general tenor of the conversation.

Finally I said: "Boys, I've got a bunch of first-class smokes in my kick; hold the wire for a moment till I duck out and dig them up," and with this I hurried back to Clara J.

I told her the awful story of the three brigands in the puff-puff room,

and explained that if those cowboys ever grew wise to the fact that we were honeying they would immediately turn that train into a howling wilderness of noise. It would be their solemn duty to tear the roof off the car and let the whole world know their gladness.

Clara J., pale but equal to the emergency, picked up the right card as usual.

"We'll fool them, John," she said.

"But how?" I moaned. "We get off at the next Big Stop; so do they."

"You take the grips," she suggested, "and get off with your vociferous friends. Walk with them to the depot, then pretend you have forgotten something and come back and join me. We can hurry out some other way, get a cab, and lose them."

"Good!" I said. "You mean that we shall do the lovers-once-but-strangers-now gag for a few minutes —immense!"

Then I bade her a fond farewell and hurried back to the trouble-hunters, who were promptly informed that detectives must have broken into my grip, for the cigars were gone.

To me the rest of that trip was one large, newly-built, and richly-furnished nightmare. I see-sawed back and forth between Clara J. and the smoke-holder like a man who is shy some of his marbles.

At last, however, the train pulled under the Big Shed, and I started to work out the pattern designed by Clara J.

Fine!

I led the three Indians in through the depot and out to a cab.

Just as they were climbing in I remembered that I had forgotten something, and with a promise to meet them at the hotel I ducked back to the wife.

It was so easy it was a shame.

Then we squeezed through a less public hole in the wall to a side street, chartered one of those whaleback hacks, and started for our hotel.

As the scow rolled along a great flood of happiness surged around me when I thought of my escape from those Josh Boys, and I handed back to Clara J. the come-on speech she had given me earlier in the game.

"The idea is Napoleonic, little woman!" I said. "It's a pipe!"

Just then the rope broke, and I began to fall, feet first.

A series of vocal explosions burst forth somewhere very near us, and when I peeped through the window in the back of our canal boat a sight met my eyes that put my blood on cold storage.

Right behind us a grinning driver urged on two horses, and back of him in the open barouche stood Ned and Walter and Jim holding on to each other and shrieking a new and evidently hastily improvised college yell:

"Coax-coo! Coax-coo!
Honeymoon! Honeymoon!
Ootsey-oo!
We are wise! Googoo eyes!
Rah-rah-rah!
John Henry!"

You could have bought us both for sixty cents in cash.

However, there was nothing to do but drive to the hotel and let those three renegades crack their throats.

At the hotel we jumped out of the weary wagon and pretended not to see our red-faced escort, but the three of them trailed behind us in Indian file, giving vent all the while to that awful yell.

It was fierce.

I felt like turning on the trio and reducing it to a pulp, and Clara J. prayed for a dark, dark corner where she could do a quiet faint.

"Foxy John!" yelled Ned, as I registered. "But I got on to you when you stood on the steps waiting for the train to stop. Look at the

tag on your grip!" And then as we entered the elevator Jim croaked, "You two for the feed of your life! You've got to dine with us, and we'll make Rome howl! We'll wait right here for you! May we kiss the bride?"

As the elevator shot up they screamed for the seventh thousand time that frightful yell.

At the third floor we stopped, and through the kindly assistance of a bell-boy and a few simoleums we were piloted across the hotel to another elevator. We rode down, reached the street through a side door, hopped into a hansom, and were driven rapidly back to the depot, where we caught an express for the seashore.

Once safely on the train again, I thought of the tag mentioned by Ned, so I gave it the look over.

It read:

JOHN HENRY HAS JUS
MARRIED MY SISTER
TREET HIM WELL FOR
MY SAKE. TACKS.

Wouldn't that get you busy?

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN HENRY'S SEASHORE VISIT.

"WE'RE all right now, old girl!" I said, when the train finally pulled into Sprayville-on-the-Sand.

But when I said so I didn't know that there were some 200,000 hack drivers waiting for us outside.

Did you ever catch that collection of horse-teasers which invariably surrounds the railroad station at a seaside resort?

You begin to miss your change as soon as they see you.

Most of these human speak-easies

are colored. They fix it that way so's they won't have to blush every time they make an overcharge.

"Where shall we go?" Clara J. asked when we saw the long line of brunette pleaders with outstretched hands inviting us to step into their wheelbarrows and get toted somewhere.

"I wish I knew the answer," I said. "I think I'll close my eyes and go down the line while I count twelve. The hotel hack I stop in front of gets us."

I tried it, but after we reached the hotel I came to the conclusion that I must have counted thirteen.

It wasn't a hotel. It was a hold-up.

They gave us a room which they

said had an ocean view. The only ocean view I could find was a ten cent picture in an eight cent frame on the wall, and even that was a scene on some cheap canal.

It was called the "Paradise House."

If the real Paradise is like that hotel, then me for that other place.

It had one bell-boy to take your traps and six clerks to take your money.

There was a large, pink-complexioned dining-room that took your appetite and treated it badly.

On the door of our room it said, "All bills must be paid weekly." If you depended on the dining-room alone for sustenance that's the only way you could pay them—weakly.

After dinner we went out to get a sniff of salt air on the veranda, but some careless person had moved both the air and the veranda.

I complained to one of the clerks.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but they've got a banquet on at the hotel next door and they've borrowed our veranda—try the back porch."

"How about the salt air?" I inquired.

"Sam!" he yelled to the bell-boy, "who's using the air?"

"Ge'man in 98, suh!" Sam replied.

"Sorry," the clerk turned to me, "but I guess you'll have to wait till the wind changes, then you'll get all that's coming to you."

We went after the porch, but that, too, was busy. One man was using

it, and he was so earnestly engaged in fanning mosquitoes that we didn't have the heart to disturb him.

The hotel push called them mosquitoes, but they looked more like crows that had lost their bread-winners.

I never acted as a meal ticket to hungrier birds.

One big brute by the name of Hector drove his drill through my hand and broke it off in me. Then he gave me a loud New Jersey laugh and flew the coop.

The only way to protect life and property when a flock of those mosquitoes lights is to pull a revolver and shoot to kill.

As we strolled out to size up the shore, we saw, leaning against a tele-

graph pole in front of the house, the hungriest looking specimen of a seashore newsboy I ever put my peeps on.

Somebody must have offered him a dinner at the "Paradise House," and the invitation gave him dyspepsia.

"Say, Mister," he piped, "gi'me a dime, will'e? I ain't eat nuttin' fer two days."

"You ain't, ain't you?" I said. "Well, what are you doing with that toothpick in your mouth?"

"I'm jus' playin' a joke on my stomach," he answered.

After that crack it was up to me to stake him.

The next day Clara J. and I put on our chorus rags and went out to push the ocean back from the shore.

The first wave I went up against hit me a bat in the eye and then tried to pull one of my arms off.

I started to tell Clara J. to look out for the undertow, when another wave came along, saw my mouth open, and went right down-stairs. It tasted exactly like the clam broth they gave me at the hotel.

Just then a little old Dutch pickle floundered out where we were and began to bite the top off the surf.

After a bit he stood up and revealed himself. He looked like a steam roller wrapped up in a red undershirt.

"Dis makes a nice bath-tub, ain'd id?" he said. "Bud doan'd you dink der vaves vas pud on a leedle too loose, yes?"

I gave him the mackerel glance, but missed him by a foot. He grinned at Clara J. and said, "You haf a nice vife. Is she yours, alretty?"

We moved on up the beach, but he trailed along after us, chatting pleasantly in the manner of an easy conversationalist.

"Could I swim her?" inquired the pretzel builder. "I am much of a swimmist mit a lady. I could also float her, because my own vife is nod a chealous voman. She is now ub on der beach eading peanuts for der benefit uf her hunger. Perhabs your vife's name is Lena, yes?"

He simply wouldn't let go, so, in order to avoid an ambulance call, I took Clara J. by the hand and we ran to cover.

A half hour later we were sitting in the sand quite close to the sea when something in a yellow make-up began to beat the waves in front of us.

"It's a sea lion!" I explained to Clara J.

"No, John," said she, "it's a man."

"A man wouldn't dare take a face like that in the water," I said. "It's a sculpin, that's what it is. Or maybe it's a mermaid's foolish brother."

The thing kept coming nearer to us, and I began to feel uneasy.

Presently Clara J. laughed, and at the same moment the horrible truth swept over me.

It was Benedict Murgatoyd—the lad with the map like a cow! The only and original Brother of the Ox.

He saw us and let a yell out of him that set the beach front back about a foot.

Then he danced up to us and all around us, gibbering like a dub with an unbuttoned brain.

"Isn't this a surprise, though! John Henry and Clara J.! *Here!* Why, six of us just ran down for two or three days—Sid D'Brie and some of the other boys. Won't they be delighted to know you're here! Where are you stopping?"

"We're not stopping, we're simply sliding through," I said.

"But you'll be here this evening?" he chirruped. "I'll get the boys together and we'll serenade you—with our mandolins! What hotel are you at?"

"The Hifalutin House," I said, giving Clara J. the sneaky elbow. "We'll be glad to see you any time after eight o'clock."

"Fine!" said the human menu card, dancing a two-step around us to the amusement of the beach gang. "Spuds Gibson is with us, and he has his cornet. We'll have a jolly spree. Say! I *must* have a kodak of you in your bathing suits. I want to show it to the boys in the office. Wait right here, won't you, till I run and get my camera—I'll not be five minutes," and off he dashed.

We hustled for the bath house, changed our clothes, and did a closed-carriage ride back to our hotel.

"Clara J.," I said, "Fate has pointed its finger at us and said to

the world, 'Sic 'em, Towser!' The trouble is we have too many fool friends who believe that our marriage will be a failure unless they explode torpedoes all over our right of way."

"Isn't it perfectly awful!" she answered.

"The only way we can honey in peace and quiet is to charter an airship and go up till we lose them," I said dismally.

"If those boys find us and start that serenade I'll simply die," she confessed.

"Then it's up to me to save your life," I answered, and an hour later we were in a train on our way back home.

CHAPTER V.

JOHN HENRY HUNTS A FLAT.

BEHIND closed doors at "Mother's" we sat on the slopes of Arcadia and gave our fool friends the laugh by the absent treatment process.

Clara J. went through the newspaper ads looking for apartments, and at the end of the week she had picked 219 winners.

One bright day Mother, Clara J., Tacks, and I sauntered forth for the purposing of finding a janitor tame enough to live in the same house with.

"A sweet little nest of our own," was the way Clara J. put it, but mentally I put the foot to that nest and pushed it out of the tree.

A nest, forsooth! Not if I saw it first. I had a friend once who built a nest in a Harlem flat, and three months later a strange bird flew in and eloped with his wife. So me for a dug-out with a yale lock on the front gate—always!

The first palace we entered bore up bravely under the name of "Heliotrope Hall."

I suppose they had sprinkled that name over it so as to counteract the effects of the stiff fight a soap factory was putting up four blocks away.

"Heliotrope Hall" was all right, but it wouldn't do. The janitor

showed us through a collection of horse stalls on the third floor, and when I asked him if he knew any place around there large enough to hold a table and two chairs he blew out his cylinder head.

The janitor told us there were only three dark rooms, and when I told him that three was too many for us and not quite enough for a photographer I thought he'd bite me.

In the meantime Tacks was out in the hall cutting his initials on the dining-room door with a penknife.

Tacks always manages to leave a wide, white wake behind him as he sails through life.

Our next guess was a high bundle of stone tied up with strings of white windows and called "The Daisyora."

Wouldn't that name make your pulse beat faster?

I've often wondered how apartment houses and Pullman cars manage to do business under the burden of the bitter names that are thrust upon them. Fancy a big slob of a car rolling through the country with the name "Babyetta" painted all over it!

I should think it would want to crawl in a tunnel and never come out again.

The janitor in "The Daisyora" was made up to look like a walrus.

When I told him what we were looking for he showed us two tusks and led the way to the elevator.

That fellow had the softest voice I ever heard. Every time he spoke it

sounded like somebody hitting a fat squash with a paddle.

After the janitor had shown us through the cubby-hole he said that no children were allowed there.

"Why not?" I said. "It looks nearly large enough."

Then he ran the tusks out again and we quit him.

Three blocks away we anchored for a few minutes at a bungalow called "The Dulcydooza."

A colored bell-boy met us at the door and dared us to come in.

We were offered a flat on the fifth floor, but the walls were so close together I told them they'd better save it. It might be a success as a place to press autumn leaves, but never as

a place to live in, unless the tenants went through life standing up.

Tacks took a knob off one of the doors as a souvenir, and we wended our weary way.

At last we found one that my wife said was a dream.

I let her sleep.

It was a jewelled joint with seven rooms and a landlord.

There were self-folding doors and hot and cold gas in every room.

The gas meter had ball-bearing axles and was guaranteed to exceed the speed limit set by law.

The dumbwaiter was so lazy that every time it went to work it let out a yell of mortal agony, and the floors were sound-proof against everything but noise.

The outlook provided a superb view of the uncompleted Subway, with blasting from 8 to 9, explosions from 12 to 2, and malaria at all hours.

However, Clara J. took a violent fancy to the cage, and in order to show her that her love was reciprocated the janitor pinched my gloves.

This particular janitor was Charles the Real. Oh, but maybe he wasn't the lad with the loud lingo!

As soon as we butted-in he picked Mama out as a steady listener, and he led her through a field of prose where the large, fat words grew in rich profusion.

When a child I fancy he must have pushed a pocket dictionary under his scalp, for he had the largest collection of homeless language I ever listened to.

" Maybe he wasn't the lad
with the loud lingo! "—Page 88.

"You will notice, Mem," he chatted on, "that the builder was very essential in obtaining large rooms so that the tenants might confirm to their own comfort. Yes, Mem; they's stationary washtubs in the kitchen; and you will notice, Mem, that the wainscoating in the dining-hall is percolated so as to inflict itself necessarily upon the harmony of the decorations you may select. Yes, Mem, it is all open plumbing."

Clara J. took me by the arm and led me through the condensed catacombs, pointing out to me the objects of interest along the route.

"This room," she said, stepping into a niche in the wall, "we'll fix up for your den."

"It might make a good den for a

squirrel, but not for me," I said. "Why, there's scarcely room to growl in a den like this."

"Nonsense, John!" she laughed. "There's plenty, plenty room."

"That's because it hasn't been papered," I explained, and then we moved on to the next stand.

"Oh, what a cute little dining-room!" she exclaimed rapturously.

"It is cute," I said. "It looks like a mouse trap."

The dining-room was just about large enough for two people and a bottle of pepsin.

Then the janitor turned on his current again. "This, Maddum, is one of the most conducive dining-rooms that has ever been desicated for the essential comfort of the tenants. The

builder disemployed much deliberation in the plan of these apartments. Yes, Mem, they's an electric foot-bell under the table, which is very essential to the servants."

"I rather like the place," said Clara J.'s mother. Then, to the janitor: "Is it a pleasant neighborhood?"

"Delirious, Maddum, deliriously so!" he replied. "They's a swell beer garden only three blocks away for them as likes their toddy in public, and the police station is only four blocks East. Some people finds considerable enjoyness in deliberating the cause of justice as it is dispelled in a police station; but, for my part, I preference a good brisk walk of an

evening, which is always essential to an exercising standpoint."

I thought that speech would cure Clara J., but she was still in dreamland.

The place pleased her, so I made up my mind she should have it. With the exception of the janitor's vocabulary it certainly was the best cellar we had found so far, and I was game to hang up my hat there if she was.

Clara J.'s mother and I trooped into the sitting-room to discuss the situation, and I was down on the floor getting the diameter and circumference of the room with my thumb when the janitor rushed in.

"Well," he said breathlessly, "I'm glad that your discretion has resulted so pleasantly."

I thought he meant me, so I apologized for picking holes in the floor with my thumb.

"Your apology is untakeable," he answered. "Since you have decided to acquire the apartment that is the necessary essential."

"What makes you think we've decided to take it?" inquired Clara J.

"The little boy who is with you," the janitor said gravely. "By some mysterious concern he secured my hatchet, and for fifteen minutes past he has been chopping down the wood-work in the butler's pantry, which is at times fatal to the building. But, of course, since you decide to take the apartment the damage is immaterial only to those who are essential by living there."

"Go," I said, "and tell that boy we've rented the apartment, but we're not going to take it away in a basket."

Tacks, with his little hatchet, had found a home for us.

CHAPTER VI.

JOHN HENRY ENTERTAINS FRIENDS.

FOR two weeks we roamed among the furniture stores measuring chairs and things to see if they were small enough to go in the flat.

Finally, however, the toy home was ready, and we moved in.

Clara J.'s delight was boundless when Mama and Papa and Tacks came up that first evening and took dinner with us.

It's true we all had to sit edge-on at the table and get our meat cut in the kitchen so as to avoid hitting each

other on the funny bone, but the idea was good, nevertheless.

Surely it makes a chap's heart swell up and beat faster when he realizes that for the first time in his life he's paying house rent for himself and a good man's daughter, even if the house isn't any bigger than a minute.

Our first experiment in the kitchen was a colored lady named Malvina. She cooked entirely by hand, and talked by machinery.

As a conversationalist she was a faster tongue trotter than the janitor, although his assortment of words would probably get him the decision on points.

Malvina was inclined to be stout, and every time it was her cue to come in and wait on the table I got up and

left the room, so that she could move about without injuring our guests.

In the first round Malvina spilled a bowl of hot soup over Father's cowlick, which showed a pretty anxiety on her part to make his visit a memorable one.

Papa expressed a desire to swear, so I led him out to the kitchen, put his head in the dumbwaiter shaft, and told him to cut loose.

He fractured the walls and stopped every clock in the house, but it made him feel better.

During the third round Malvina came in with the lamb chops, slipped on the soup-painted floor, and handed the whole plateful of hot meat to Tacks.

He reached for one chop with his

left eye and took the rest in his lap.

Malvina rushed out in the kitchen, crawled behind the gas range, and refused to be comforted. She declared that some one had "cern'ly conj'ahd" her, and then she raised her voice in lamentation and didn't stop talking for three mortal hours.

Otherwise our first dinner party passed off very pleasantly. Mother expressed herself as charmed with our *entourage*, and Papa said that with the exception of our facilities for landing soup at the right wharf we were all to the good.

The next day Clara J. suggested that we give a house-warming to our friends.

"I'm for it," I agreed, "but you must remember that we have quite

a bulky bunch on our list, and as we can only get a sprinkling of them in here at one time we'll have to give a continuous."

Clara J. undertook to arrange that detail, and shortly thereafter we gave our first public performance.

Eight friends arrived at the appointed hour, and as there was only room for six of them in the flat we stood the surplus out in the main hall and told them to hold an overflow meeting.

During the first half hour we entertained each other by getting wedged in the sitting-room so tightly that Malvina had to pry us out.

After that we made a solemn compact never to try to enter any room in which four people had already as-

sembled. This plan probably saved the lives of many present.

After a time my wife started to play the piano, and two minutes later the man who lived in the flat above us sent down word that his kid was asleep, and if we didn't stop beating the music box he'd have us all pinched.

I sent a nice, diplomatic message to the man overhead, in which I mentioned the name of a place that I'd permit him to go to.

Then the man sent the janitor after me. I told the janitor that this is a free country, and he replied: "Maybe it is, but you can't prove it."

So we decided to cut out the music and started a quarter limit game of poker.

"You must stop beating
the music box!"—Page 100.

The players were Jim Nelson and his wife, Charlie Payne, Fred Parsons, Clara J., and myself.

Jim Nelson thinks that when it comes to poker he's about the warmest little bundle of nerves that ever tapped a Jack. To hear him talk you'd think he wrote the game. He's one of those fluffs who whistle for the police when they lose eighty cents and get the frosted Trilbies when they win a dollar ninety.

Charlie Payne plays them close to his shirt studs and always forgets to ante. His bad memory has saved a lot of money for him.

Fred Parsons is one of those loud players. Every time he wins a pot he bubbles all over like seltzer water going in a glass. When he loses he

hits the table and says, "Dammaluck! Why didn't I throw away the other card."

I wasn't wise to the abilities of the others, although I had a strong suspicion that Clara J. would put up a regular Cherry Sister game. I had never heard her speak of cards, and I was prepared to hear her ask any minute if the King of trumps beat a four flush.

We played along for half an hour without anything painful happening. Clara J. handled her cards as though they were perfect strangers to each other and she was a trifle nervous, but she trailed along with the bunch.

For Jim Nelson they were coming in carriages. He must have been six dollars in, and, consequently, he was bursting with an inward joy.

Then came a Jackpot, which went around three or four times, and was finally opened by Jim. We all stayed in, and after the draw it was just beginning to look cheerful, when Clara J. said eagerly, "Oh, John, do sixes beat fulls?"

Everybody present dipped up a titter, and the poor girl looked ready to faint.

"Sure!" I said, just to bring her back to earth, and the game went on.

Jim bet his quarter and Charlie Payne raised him. Clara J. was next, and she hoisted them both, to my painful surprise.

The rest of us dropped out, and so did Charlie on the next lap.

It was Jim and Clara J. for it, and I had to sit there and watch her being

dragged to the shambles, powerless to help her.

Every time Jim said his little speech she was back at him with a raise.

I could see a whole month's household expenses travelling home in Jim's pocket.

During those few terrible moments I'll bet Mrs. Jim bought two new hats and a tailor made with the spoils her robber husband was going to haul in.

It was cruel.

I tried to give Clara J. the bugle to cease firing, but she never once looked in my direction.

Jim had nearly all his chips in and Clara J. had reached over and touched my stack for a handful.

The pot looked as big as a bunch

of Christmas money, and I began to see visions of deputy sheriffs running off with our furniture.

Jim was breathing hard, and I fancied I could almost hear him saying over and over to himself, "This is a sin and I hate to do it, but I need the money."

Presently, when all his chips were in, he repented and called Clara J.

As he did so he threw a King full of bullets down on the table, and with an apologetic smile proceeded to pull in the gate receipts.

Clara J. said very coolly, "Won't you walk slowly, Mr. Nelson?" and with that she spread her hand out on the table—four sixes and a seven-spot!

Stung!

Jim framed his face in the sickliest

smile I ever saw, and Mrs. Jim awoke from her dry-goods dream with a start that nearly upset the table.

Clara J., the Bunco Girl! Did you hear her say, "John, do sixes beat fulls?" Isn't she a wonder, though?

After that the game seemed to drag, and finally, when it broke up, Jim was so much to the bad that Mrs. Jim had made up her mind to discharge their servant girl as soon as she reached home.

When the company had gone I said to Clara J.: "Where did you get that fourth Six, and who taught you the game?"

"Oh," she answered with a smile, "I just picked it up!"

"Which," I said, "the game or the Six?"

She never did answer me.

CHAPTER VII.

JOHN HENRY PLAYS PING PONG.

DO you ever ping?
Have you dallied with the pong?

If you haven't crawled around under the furniture looking for a fat little celluloid spheroid for the purpose of soaking it in the slats with a paddle, then your education is away to the worse.

Ping pong has every other game on the hot-foot!

Lawn tennis and parlor polo, and old maid and crokinole and checkers

are all out in the woods, deep under the shrubbery.

Ping pong has put them all on blink.

The game was invented by two Chinamen—Ping and Pong.

They used to keep a laundry, but business was bad, and one day they began to jaw each other in rat language. Finally Ping grabbed the soap, and threw it at Pong. Pong got under it and sent it back, but Ping missed it, and the soap went through the window.

A nervous policeman was standing outside when the soap arrived. It struck him on the ear and made good.

In the meantime Ping went after the soap, Pong went after Ping, and the cop got next and fanned them both.

That's how ping pong started.

The rules of the game are very light-waisted and easy to learn.

In case any of my friends aren't wise I'll pass the butter.

Rule First: Under the net and over; two up and one to play, always discard the ace and lead trumps.

Rule Second: Play in other people's parlors as much as possible if you love your own furniture.

Rule Third: It's a table stakes game, always. If your partner gets fussy throw the bat at him and walk off the field.

Rule Fourth: If you should accidentally step on the foot of a spectator call for help and have him pinched.

Rule Fifth: Driving the ball

through an open window makes the score "thirty all"; through a closed window it is "thirty cents."

Rule Sixth: Always show your teeth when you serve.

Rule Seventh: If the ball hits you in the face, close it quickly and say nothing. One of the best jokes of the game is to let the ball slide gracefully half-way down your throat, and stand perfectly still while your opponent crawls under the sideboard looking for it. If you swallow the ball you lose one point.

Rule Eighth: If you have a losing streak never bite the table, especially when ladies are present.

Rule Ninth: Every time you win a set raise your head and bark like a

sea lion. This will attract attention to your voice.

Rule Tenth: When in doubt never try to chew the vellum off the paddle. If you do you lose little casino and maybe a tooth or two.

Rule Eleventh: Never play ping pong on an empty stomach. Always use the dining-room table.

Rule Twelfth: If anybody not playing happens to be struck by falling chandeliers or plaster, the score is then "Love-all," and the game starts over.

Ping pong is a fine game when you know the rules and play it on the level!

One evening Tacks brought a lay-out up to our flat and dared me to learn it.

After he had batted me in the eye six consecutive times I decided I knew the game, and sent him out with the growler for a pint of arnica.

The next evening we all went to see the new "John Henry" show, and we certainly got all that was coming to us.

Father cut the string on a new bundle of laughs at the go-off, and he's had the hiccoughs ever since.

They've named the show after yours indefinitely, meaning me, and, say! it's the right change!

If there's any truth in the old saying, "Laugh and grow fat," then you for the Fat Man's Club after you see the "John Henry" show.

George Lederer has surely bunched a saucy crew of smile-pick-

ers, and when they get the flag and start around for the judge's stand, believe me, there's plenty doing in the button-bursting business.

If ever the "John Henry" show hits your town grab the family and move into a front seat—you'll be Daddy-at-the-Circus, all right, all right!

A week or so later Billy DeVries, Elder Humbird, and Jake Roberts were in town, so I invited them up to the cage to burn the edge off an evening with us.

Mother and Father and Tacks were helping us to wear out the furniture, so we had a grand total of eight souls in the flat when the carrying capacity was regulated by law to no more than four grown-ups and a canary bird.

It was a squeezy affair.

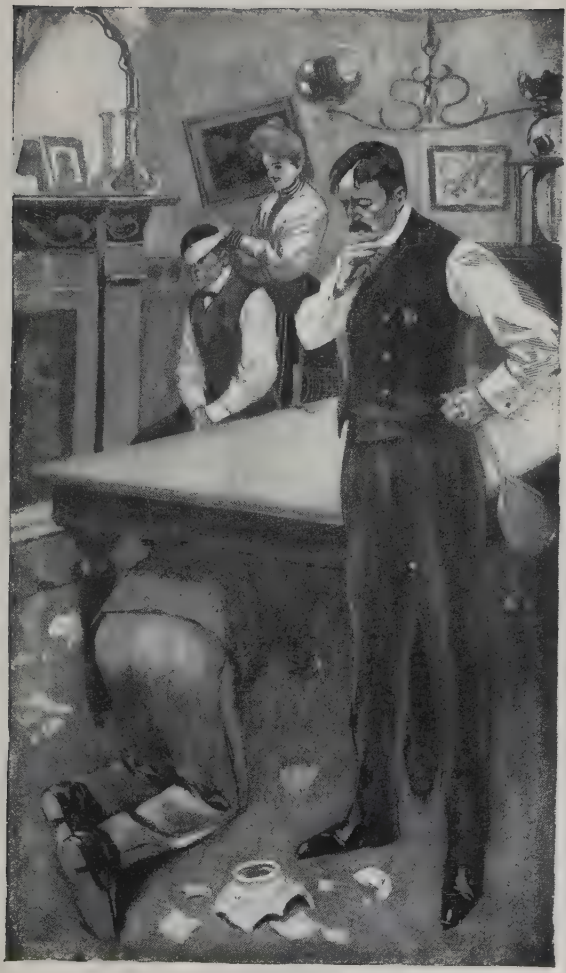
After a bit Jake Roberts piped the ping pong outfit, and he began to yell for a little action with the elbow.

Jake's long suit is ping pong. When it comes to batting them out he considers himself a regular Doctor Fierce.

To my mind it looks cruel to see a stout, husky brute of a man with a back of a banjo in his hand trying to swat the daylights out of a ball about the size of the lump in your throat.

Well, Jake and Billy DeVries started to play, and Clara J. and her mother left the room, in order to avoid any loose language that the heat of conflict might call forth.

Before the two gillies left their



"Ping pong is a great game—
for the furniture dealers."—Page 115

corners we all shook hands, and agreed not to give our right names if the police butted in.

Jake's first guess was a vase on the mantelpiece, and he landed. Then Billy went after its mate, and put that to the bad. It didn't take long to get that set.

At the end of the first round the score stood three chairs, a clock, and a china closet smashed, six picture frames disabled, and the cook on her way for another job.

Ping pong is a great game—for the furniture dealers.

In ten minutes' play those two flpps put all our bric-à-brac out of the show business.

Then Roberts sent up a loud howl because I didn't have a trained dachs-

hund to go after the ball when it rolled under the furniture.

A few minutes later Billy made a fumble, his paddle slipped and struck Father just between the watch charm and the lowest vest button.

Papa went up in the air and turned out a noise like a scared tugboat.

Elder Humbird told the old gentleman he had an attack of tenosynovitis, whereupon Father fell over the table and broke up the game.

But that didn't stop Jake from playing the game with his gab. He's one of those lads with a fat baritone voice, and he chokes if he can't tell you how it happened.

So Jake sat down on the piano stool and began to give an imitation of an egg-plant. Every time he

made a gesture the piano stool squeaked in mezzo-soprano, and we felt for our bowie knives.

"'Member, Bill!" Jake began, "'member that evening we played for seven hours without a stop for meals? Say, John, it was the real rinkyloorum, that battle was—oh, maybe! In the twenty-fourth set Billy tried to pong the pinger, but, unfortunately, the ponger pinged pongfully into the pingless end of the pong, with the result that a pingful of pong struck the ceiling, bounced back, hit the pongee just between the ping and the pong, and then ponged its way pingingly out through the unponged window!"

Jake paused for breath, and I

reached for a rock, but he toddled along:

"The pinger at once seized the pong and punged a pong that unpinged the china closet. The score was then Forty-Love in Billy's favor, with two pings to play and a pong to the good. This was followed by the pinging of a set of breakfast dishes, which ponged under the table and burst into pingless fragments. Whereupon the pingist unponged a ping which pung the pong into the ping, or, in other words, the pingless ponger pung the pong without stopping to unpong the pingus, which left two pongs over and above the ping pong——"

Say, he had us going! When that boy wades out among the technicali-

ties of the game something has to give way.

Something did. It was a handsomely bound copy of Bunyan's "Pilgrims Progress," and it met Jake just between the chin and the Adam's apple, and stayed there long enough to change the subject.

Then the girls floated back, and Clara J. asked Billy and Elder if they wouldn't sing.

They said they wouldn't and saved our lives.

But you couldn't lose that Roberts boy. He dragged out a sick violin and began to tease it to death.

Jake had just volunteered to pull a waltz away from the shrieking instrument when something happened.

A loud explosion shook the flat; the kitchen door sailed into the parlor, knocked the fiddle down, and fell on it.

We hurried out to see what was the matter, and found it was mostly Tacks.

When Clara J. asked the boys to sing, Tacks, becoming discouraged, rushed into the kitchen and turned the gas on in the range. Eighty-seven cubic yards escaped, and Tacks lit a match to see what would happen,

That was why the kitchen door came in the parlor so abruptly.

Otherwise no one was injured, and it is delightful to be able to chronicle the fact that Jake's violin was put out

of its misery before that waltz was peeled off.

Tacks always manages to do the right thing.

THE END.

Have you given the other "John Henry" books "the look-over?" "John Henry" was issued in April, 1901, and very quickly reached a sale of 50,000. It's popularity since then has been unprecedented.

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